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AUTHOR Baird, John R.
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ABSTRACT

This paper reports the results of 4 years of a mentoring program at the University of Melbourne (Victoria, Australia) that has been directed to developing the research aspirations and performance of ex-Melbourne College of Advanced Education staff who are coping with increased research demands following the 1989 amalgamation with the University of Melbourne's Faculty of Education. Participants for the program each year were selected on the bases of their research performance or potential and the extent to which their research activity had been limited by various types of structural or circumstantial factors. The program's key elements included fractional time release for research, individualized mentoring, and group collaboration. The mentor's role involved assisting staff to focus on and clarify research goals and to support and guide staff in their progress. The program's success has been evidenced through such outcomes as conference presentations, publication of articles in refereed journals, completion of postgraduate research publications, and success at gaining competitive or peer-reviewed funding for further research. (JDD)

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MENTORING FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TERTIARY EDUCATORS

ED 375 099

John R. Baird, University of Melbourne

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ABSTRACT

For the four years 1991 - 1994, the Institute of Education , University of Melbourne has run a Staff Development Program for academic staff at Levels B and C. This program is to enhance the research aspirations and performance of ex-Melbourne College of Advanced Education teacher educators who are coping with changed research demands following the 1989 amalgamation with the University of Melbourne's Faculty of Education. Participants for the program each year were selected on the bases of their research performance or potential, and the extent to which their research activity had been limited by various types of structural or circumstantial factors (such as high teaching or administrative loads, or gender-related circumstances). Originally funded through the national Staff Development Fund (Cathie Committee) for 1991 and 1992, the program is now funded yearly by an allocation from the General Budget of the Institute. The program provides fractional time release for staff (currently one day per week for the teaching year) coupled with the opportunity for continuing mentoring by myself as Coordinator of the program. My role has largely been to assist staff to focus on and clarify their research goals, and to support and guide them in their progress as required. Overall, seventy-five staff have participated in the program for periods of from one to three years. Based on a variety of performance indicators, such as successful completion of higher research degrees, presentation of conference papers, and publication of scholarly articles, the program has been most successful. Details of the rationale and progress of the program will be given, especially an examination of the mentor's role in fostering change.

INTRODUCTION

Recently, their has been a resurgence in the notion of mentoring for educational professional development (PD). Diverse reports of empirical research and reflective articles have focussed on the use of mentors for PD of undergraduate students, naive and experienced teachers, and university academics (e.g. Caldwell and Carter, 1993, Jacobi, 1991). In this paper, I report the results of four years of a mentoring program at the University of Melbourne that has been directed to developing of the research aspirations and performance of ex-CAE staff. The program was based on three key elements: fractional time release; individualised mentoring; group collaboration. I first outline the background, nature, rationale, and development of the program and then consider its outcomes from the perspective of my influence as mentor.

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BACKGROUND, NATURE AND STRUCTURE OF THE PROGRAM

Establishment Of The 1991 Program

The University of Melbourne Institute of Education (IE) was created in 1989 as the result of the amalgamation between the University's Faculty of Education and the Melbourne College of Advanced Education (MCAE). One of the consequences of this amalgamation was that ex-MCAE staff had to adjust to a situation where research was significantly more important for performance and, especially, promotion than had been the case. Changed expectations regarding roles and responsibilities meant that many of these staff needed to either gain research qualifications and experience or enter into an active program of research. Often, however, this action was made difficult by continuing high teaching and administrative loads, or limited research experience and aspirations. For some staff, the magnitude of these obstacles seemed such as to virtually preclude them from an appropriate process of personal and professional development.

In 1990, on behalf of the University of Melbourne, the Institute of Education applied to the national Staff Development Fund (SDF), administered by a committee chaired by Mr. Ian Cathie. The SDF arose from agreements regarding the Structural Efficiency Principle, as part of Academic Award Restructuring:

> *In accordance with the agreement on structural efficiency tendered before the Australian Industrial Relations Commission on 11 May 1990 institutions will be required to develop structured plans for staff development in accordance with nationally determined guidelines. The agreement also notes that grants from the Staff Development Fund, which is administered on a bipartite basis, may be available to assist specific staff development initiatives in addition to existing institutional funds....Staff Development Plans should offer staff members the opportunity to develop their skills and effectiveness within the institution, and to promote improved performance and efficiency and to adopt new technology. Further, they should be compatible with the development of equal opportunity and affirmative action policies. (Academic Award Restructuring, Proposed Structural Efficiency Principle agreement, Institutionally-based guidelines on Staff Development Plans, Attachment 1 (p.27)).*

The application was successful, and $250,000 was granted for implementation of an Institute Staff Development Program (IESDP) in 1991.

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The University's application centred on attempting to overcome prior limitations placed on many IE staff for conducting research as part of their normal duties. It targeted particular academic staff at Lecturer (Level B) level:

> *Staff of the University in the lecturer range...are to be encouraged by time release to participate in research so that there will be an increase in their contributions to scholarly publications, exhibitions and performances and in their success rate in applications for research grants. More staff will qualify for higher degrees, be equipped to conduct meaningful research and be competitive in seeking research grants, supervise post-graduate students and satisfy the requirements of the University's promotion system" (1990 Application p.1).*

A program of staff development based on fractional time release and support was proposed. Staff benefiting from the program would be those with little previous research experience or current research activity, but with identified potential, who could demonstrate that their lack of opportunity to pursue research was attributable to specific conditions of disadvantage. The major categories of prior disadvantage that were considered were:

> *- gender related circumstances;*
> *- high level teaching commitments sustained over a period of years;*
> *- high levels of administrative duties sustained over a period of years and formally assigned by faculty, department, program committee, etc.;... and*
> *- appointment to staff by way of a succession of short term, temporary contracts (1990 Application, p.9).*

Applications from staff of the Institute were sought and, in December 1990, thirty-five staff at lecturer level who met the criteria above were selected by an IESDP Selection Committee. The committee awarded two categories of time release, based on the experience and needs of the applicants: between 0.2-0.5 for the calendar year to pursue a higher degree; 0.2 (in one case, 0.1) for twenty-seven teaching weeks to either enhance research skills (by attending research development seminars) or to produce at least one scholarly article. As a general rule, the applicants who were awarded time release to pursue a higher degree or to produce a scholarly article had already demonstrated some significant prior educational research activity. Some members of this group had already completed a Masters or Doctoral degree. Alternatively, those applicants awarded time release to enhance their research skills had had little prior research experience or formal research training. Included in the

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application was an allocation of funds to provide for "a person with high level research development expertise... to lead the research development [seminars]" (1990 Application, p.11). These seminars were to be directed primarily to the 0.2/27 week participants, as a means of developing their research skills.

When, late in 1990, I was asked to organise and deliver these seminars, I proposed an alternative course of action. I justified this course of action on findings from some recent teacher development projects that I had coordinated. These findings demonstrated that individual development was strongly fostered by intensive, on-going collaborative guidance and support. I proposed that, instead of basing my assistance on a series of pre-determined group seminars, I act as a mentor for all participants in the program. In this way, I could progressively tailor help to individual progress and needs. This proposal was adopted and I spent 0.5 time in 1991 in this mentoring role.

Development Of The Program In 1992-1994

I shall review particular program outcomes later. Here, I summarise the development of the program in the three years 1992-1994.

Based on a successful initial program (Baird, 1992), the Institute of Education made a second application to the SDF for funding in 1992. This application was successful, and a sum of $250,000 was allocated to the University. $180,000 of this amount was made available to the IESDP; the remainder was used for funding of relocation and retraining of some ex-IE staff who had joined other University faculties. A similar IE application and selection procedure was adopted at the end of 1991, and thirty-one Level B academic staff were selected for the 1992 program. This year, staff were granted fractional time release of either 0.2 for the calender year, or 0.2 for 27 weeks. Details of the 1992 IESDP are provided in Baird (1993a). Again, I was released 0.5 time to coordinate the program and to provide mentoring assistance.

A University application was not made to the SDF in 1992 but, based on the success of the program in its first two years, the IE committed funds from its general operating budget for continuance of the program in 1993 and 1994. The amounts allocated to the IESDP in these two years was $100,000 for 1993 and $75,000 for 1994. These amounts are additional to the funds needed for my 0.5 time release. In times of considerable upheaval in the structure and direction of the IE and, particularly in a time of substantially diminishing budgets, it is gratifying that the program was considered by the

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IEs Budget and Resource Allocation Committee to be worthy of continuing support. Because of the lower allocation, however, fractional time release for successful applicants was limited to 0.2 for 27 weeks. For both 1993 and 1994, applications were sought from IE academic staff at both Levels B and C; 24 staff participated in the program in 1993 and 18 in 1994. Table 1 provides a summary of the number of participants in the IESDP over its four years duration.

TABLE 1

PARTICIPANTS IN IESDP, 1991-1994

	1991	1992	1993	1994	Total
Number of participants: women; men; total	27; 8; **35**	23; 8; **31**	17; 7; **24**	13; 5; **18**	53; 22; **75**

Most (47) of the total 75 staff joined the program for only one year, but 25 participated twice, and 3 participated three times. Staff varied widely in their Departmental affiliation (Early Childhood; Visual and Performing Arts; Science and Mathematics; Social and Educational Studies; Curriculum, Teaching and Learning; Language and Literacy Education; Librarianship, Information Management and Business Studies; Educational Psychology and Special Education) and, thus, the focus of their research interests and activities.

MY ROLE AS MENTOR

My conception of a mentor is a **Helper + Sharer + Carer** (Baird,1993b). As I describe, these three aspects of the mentoring role involve both cognitive and affective attributes:

> *This triplet of pro-social attributes blends cognitive responsibilities (e.g. adviser, guide) with the affective caring and sharing that enrich the relationship for both parties. As such, typical mentor behaviours should best be described dualistically - a caring listener, a critical friend, a concerned adviser. As a caring listener, for instance, you hear more than they say - you are attuned to the subtle, personal communications that provide information necessary to inform your response and strengthen the value of the relationship to them. Important affective aspects of the role involve respect, sensitivity, perceptiveness, care, concern, encouragement and enthusiasm. A primary objective of the mentor is to emancipate, not just to advise. (p.55)*

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I believe that the role of the mentor is to foster in the mentee a process of **purposeful enquiry** (comprising focussed, systematic *reflection* and *action*) that will generate three types of outcome. The first outcome is enhanced **metacognition** (knowledge about, awareness of, and control over, personal practice). The other two outcomes associated with such enhanced metacognition are **understanding** of the work done, and various **affective benefits**, such as feelings of self-efficacy, confidence, enthusiasm, and commitment.

In addition, however, are the benefits that the mentor experiences by engaging in the role. Indeed, these benefits are of the same type as for the mentee above. The mentor needs to engage in a process of purposeful enquiry regarding how best to service the needs of each mentee. If performed properly, this process will generate the three outcomes of learning more about what it is to be a mentor, being more aware of what to do and how to do at a particular stage of the mentoring process, and feeling more enthusiastic, in control, and effective in the role.

Through the program, I provided various types of assistance to the participants. These types of assistance included:

* Stimulating personal motivation by providing support and encouragement, and attempting to foster a spirit of shared endeavour;
* Through the one-to-one and group meetings, providing a referral and accountability structure that encouraged purposeful progress;
* Clarifying personal research interests and critically appraising each interest in terms of its current status, potential for worthwhile outcomes, and relevance to individual needs and institutional futures. Then, selecting those interests that should be pursued;
* Focussing on selected research areas, and formulating suitable and feasible research questions;
* Providing guidance regarding research design, approach, and methods;
* Reading and evaluating papers or theses, prior to formal submission;
* Providing information regarding mechanisms for publication of research, and appropriate presentation styles.

I approached these goals through one-to-one contact with the participants, but each year I also arranged a number of small Research Discussion Groups for interested staff. These groups met

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approximately once a month, and provided a forum for sharing ideas and progress, and for guidance and support for future work. In the next section, I shall refer briefly to the outcomes of the IESDP.

OUTCOMES OF THE PROGRAM OVER THE FOUR YEARS

Each year, in addition to my detailed monitoring of their progress through individual interviews and small group discussions, all staff completed a written evaluation of their progress and of the program at mid-year (June/July) and end-of-year (December). In 1991, an external evaluation of the program was conducted by a senior member of the University of Melbourne academic staff union (see Baird, 1992). In two detailed reports on the IESDP for 1991 and 1992 (Baird, 1992, 1993a), I have reported successful outcomes of the program in terms of various performance indicators, such as conference presentations, publication of articles in refereed journals, completion of post-graduate research publications, and success at gaining competitive or peer-reviewed funding for further research. There are comprehensive data that similar success on these measures was achieved in the following two years. Here, however, I shall focus on some participants' perceptions of the value of the program to them.

The two key elements of IESDP were the fractional time release that, for many staff, provided them for the first time with an effective opportunity to focus and act on their research aspirations and performance, and the mentoring aspect of the program that, for many participants, assisted them in this process. Some quotes from participants' mid-year and end-of-year written evaluations provide a small sample of their feelings:

Outcomes:

> *The success I have had with my research in 1991 has given me the impetus to place research as a higher priority in my academic life to what it once was. Also by having a new direction in my work that stimulates me has given a lift to my approach to all aspects of my academic life. (1991)*
>
> *I have gained greater confidence in relation to general research requirements and now feel quite "capable" in an academic sense. This increased awareness now enables me to work more effectively with my own students. I am excited by the thought of further study which I now view as a liberating activity. I feel that I have been working too "narrowly" in the past, tending to stay within the confines of my area of expertise. I now feel confident enough to branch outwards in allied yet unknown areas. (1992)*
>
> *Through reading and art practice, I have identified with greater clarity the form and content of my research, although I still consider further development in this area*

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necessary. I also have a better sense of how to structure and prioritize the study. (1992)

Increased knowledge in both Mathematics Education and Curriculum Development. Improvement in research and writing skills. Increased confidence in "Presentation" techniques. (1992)

Greater confidence in my skills of:

- *personal interaction with others*
- *organisation of people, time, meeting deadlines*
- *the research process - data collection and analysis*
- *background reading and understanding of relevant research. (1992)*

The importance of the time release:

Very helpful - I could not have achieved all of my outcomes without it. (1991)

Time release was crucial. In 1991 I found it very difficult to combine study with full-time teaching and a heavy load of school visits and administrative responsibilities. Having one clear day per week to devote to my own research led to a greater sense of commitment and achievement. (1992)

I simply could not have pursued any research without setting aside one day a week.(1992)

The provision of time release has been a crucial factor in the pursuit of my own professional development. I now feel more enthusiastic about continuing research in the field and more confident about my ability to successfully complete it. (1992)

Role of the mentor:

John has been most generous with his time and his invitations to act as a sounding board, an offer which I gratefully took up as I was finding my feet earlier in the year. He was one of the people who was instrumental in helping me to perceive myself as an academic as well as a teacher-trainer.(1991)

(i) JB made himself available whenever needed,
(ii) Provided excellent help in reducing and prioritising tasks,
(iii) Volunteered to read my [ ] paper. Criticisms perfectly sound and were later incorporated along with some new information,
(iv) Made helpful suggestions on [ ] proposal.
I think he met my needs admirably. (1991)

The mentor concept seems to be a good one. Combined with collaborative research it seems a good principle for our new department ... Despite <u>initial</u> misgivings about the appropriateness of the research person/ mentor idea, I think the program has been a good use of money. JB's own performance dispelled my doubts that I had initially. (1991)

I have found John Baird to be effective in providing the guidance that I needed for getting started. He has also been most supportive, in that I have known that he

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would help me as required. It was also good to have a regular meeting with him and others as a time for semi-formal review. (1992)

John's support and guidance was always valued, both for its broad thrust and its attention to details.(1992)

CONCLUSION

While I acknowledge that the reports of progress and outcomes presented above involve participants' self-report data, these findings still provide compelling evidence for the inference that significant and durable change occurred in research aspirations and performance for many participants. There are two main reasons for this assertion:

- through my on-going, close association with many of the participants over the course of the year, my impressions of the nature and extent of personal and professional change corroborate those reported above;
- such outcomes as presentation of research papers at scholarly conferences, production of published articles and successful post-graduate theses and reports, and success competing for research funds both at the Institute and more widely, provide visible and independent evidence for productive research activity.

Notwithstanding the two reasons above, however, I believe that simply having these staff move to a position where they feel more assured and confident about, in control of, and successful at the research enterprise is itself a significant and worthwhile outcome, as it will dictate attitudes, aspirations, motivation and commitment regarding future personal research activity.

There is no doubt that the majority of IESDP participants took full advantage of the program, and conscientiously applied themselves to developing their research profile, with marked success. While time and work pressures remained, they attempted to use the time provided as efficiently and effectively as they could. Many of the quotes attest eloquently to the value of close, individualised mentoring and regular peer contact and review to provide the opportunities, guidance, and support during a demanding and often unsettling process of major personal and professional change. I believe that the basis underlying the implementation of the IESDP is a worthwhile model for staff development programs in other tertiary institutions.

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